Three Species of Small Lizards — two of them new

Genus *Menetia* (Lacertilia, Scincidae) in Queensland

By Glen J. Ingram*

Abstract

Three species of *Menetia* occur in Queensland. These are *M. greyii* Gray, *M. timlowi* sp.nov., and *M. zynja* sp.nov.

Introduction

Fuhn (1969) resurrected the genus *Menetia*, and until recently it was regarded as monotypic. Storr (1976) described two new species from Western Australia and noted the existence of at least another two undescribed species in Australia. This present review is a companion work to Storr's paper and the reader is referred to it.

I thank Dr. Glen Storr for his encouragement and help, and Tim Low for drawing my attention to the presence of *Menetia* on the eastern coast of Queensland. The material on which this revision is based is housed in the Queensland Museum.

Genus *Menetia* Gray

1845 *Menetia* Gray, 1845. 'Catalogue of the specimens of lizards in the collection of the British Museum', p.65. Type species by monotypy *M. greyii* Gray.

Diagnosis and Description

See Storr (1976), but add to description: interparietal may be absent or fused, supraciliaries 2-5, and delete 'second largest'.

Distribution

Most of Australia except Cape York, eastern New South Wales, southern Victoria and Tasmania.

*Queensland Museum

***Menetia greyii* Gray**

1845 *Menetia greyii*, Gray. 'Catalogue of the lizards in the collection of the British Museum', p.66. Western Australia. Lectotype, British Museum of Natural History No. 1946.8.16.9.

Diagnosis

First (and only) supraocular much more than twice as long as wide, separated from first supraciliary by a very large second supraciliary which contacts the prefrontal. One large presubocular. Well defined white midlateral stripe.

Distribution

Lower southern Queensland from Birdsville east to Roma; and coastally from Bundaberg north to near Bowen. Extralimital in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 16-35 (N = 14, mean 29.7). Tail up to 1.72 as long as snout to vent (N = 3).

Nasals separated. Prefrontals usually separated rarely forming a suture or contacting. Presubocular large and single. One supraocular, with a large upper postocular posterior to it. Supraciliaries 2, second greatly enlarged and in contact with the prefrontal. Upper labials 6, 4th below the orbit. Interparietal distinct. Midbody scale rows 20-22 (N = 13, mean 21.2). Lamellae under fourth toe 18-23 (N = 14, mean 19.6).

Colour

Dorsally light brown with 3-5 series of

KEY

1. First supraocular nearly three times as long as wide; supraciliaries 2-3, second enlarged; interparietal free 2
   First supraocular about twice as long as wide; supraciliaries five, subequal; interparietal fused to frontoparietal ..... *M.timlowi*
2. Second supraciliary much larger than first and in contact with prefrontal; one presuboccular; well developed white midlateral stripe ..... *M.greyii*.
   Second supraciliary a little longer than first and not in contact with prefrontal; 2 presuboculars; no white midlateral stripe ..... *M.zynja*.

black dots beginning behind head and continuing down tail. Thick brown or black line from nares through eye along upper lateral surface breaking up into a series of dots on tail; below this is a white midlateral line beginning under eye and finishing at base of tail. Ventral surface immaculate but under tail and preanal scales may be dotted with brown.

Material examined

J9744-6 Birdsville; J21960 275 km S of Boulia; J26503 Cuddapan Station; J26199 Thargomindah; J26430-1 Dynevor Lakes; J11974 N of Roma; J15709, 15712 "Rewan", 80 km SW of Rolleston; J15677 80 km E of Injune; J24831 Bundaberg; J25159 Wathara, N of Bowen.

Menetia timlowi sp.nov.

Holotype

J24940 Barmount, 80 km NW of Marlborough, ME. Queensland (22°32′, 149°06′E) collected by Tim Low on 12 December 1974. (See figs. 1 and 2).

Diagnosis

Two supraoculars, the first not much more than twice as long as wide. Supraciliaries 5, subequal. Upper most circumocular scales greatly enlarged. Two presuboculars. Interparietal fused to frontoparietals. Further distinguished from *Carlia burnetti* by completely fused eyelid.

Distribution

From Chinchilla, SE Queensland north along the coast to Magnetic Island in the north-east.

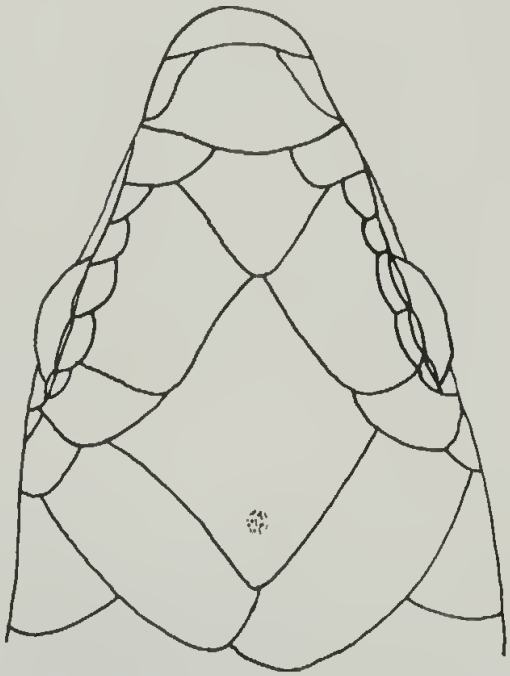

Fig. 1. Dorsal view of head of holotype of *Menetia timlowi* (J24940).

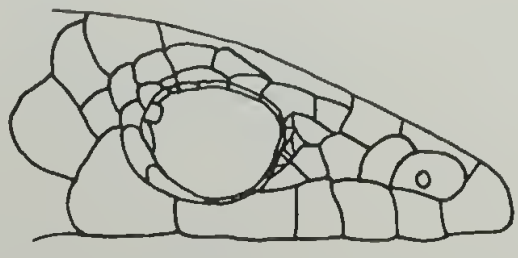

Fig. 2. Lateral view of head of holotype of *Menetia timlowi* (J24940). Lower jaw not illustrated.

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 22-26 (N = 3, mean 24.3). Tail up to 1.32 as long as snout to vent (N = 1).

Nasals very widely separated. Prefrontals separated. Two presuboculars. Two supraoculars (on one specimen these are fused), the first about twice as long as wide, and a little longer than the second. No large upper postocular. Supraciliaries 5, subequal. Upper circumoculars enlarged, appearing like a second row of supraciliaries. Upper labials 6, 4th below the orbit, and 5th very large. Intraparietal fused to frontoparietal. Midbody scale rows 20 (N = 3). Lamellae under fourth toe 15-17 (N = 3, mean 16.3).

Colour

Brown dorsally, dark brown laterally, broken into dots on side of tail and head. Underside of tail heavily flecked with brown, rest of ventral surface sparsely flecked, but neck and chin white.

Remarks

M. timlowi appears to be similar to both *Carlia burnetti* and *M. surda*. *C. burnetti* differs from *timlowi* in having a free interparietal, incompletely fused lower eyelids, four transversely orientated supraoculars, and the upper circumocular scales are not enlarged. *M. timlowi* may be in fact a *Carlia* but the following considerations influenced its placement in *Menetia*: the long narrow obliquely orientated first supracocular; the enlarged upper circumoculars; and all *Carlia*, except *burnetti*, lack fused lower eyelids and have a typically anvil shaped presubocular. The generic position of *C. burnetti* is also subject to some debate. (Ingram & Covacevich, pers.comm.; Fuhn *in litt.*). *M. timlowi* appears to resemble *M. Surda* which has similar supraoculars, an enlarged circumocular and up to 4 supraciliares,where the second is not as large as in *M. greyii* or *maini*.

The species is named after Tim Low who first brought this skink to notice.

* Since this paper went to press, a fourth specimen of *M. timlowi* has come to hand from Alpha, Central Queensland (24°08'S, 146°38'E).

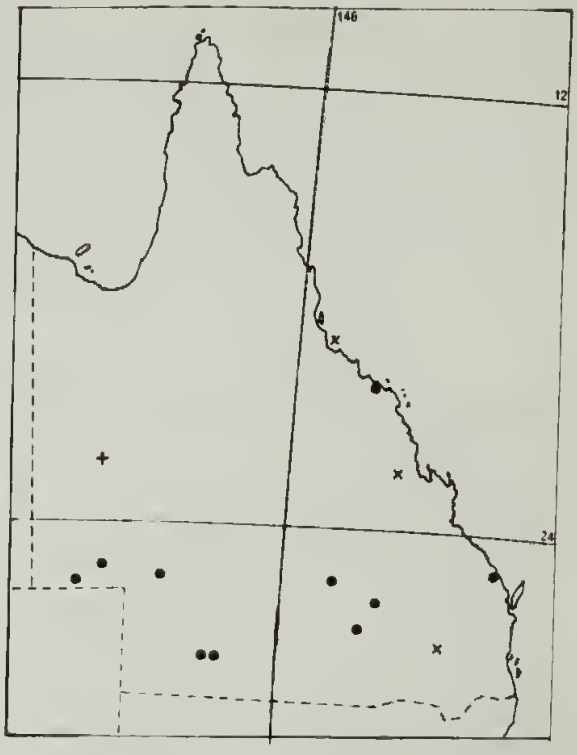

Fig. 3. Distribution of *Menetia* in Queensland. ● *M. greyii*; x *M. Timlowi*; + *M zynja*.

Paratypes

J24448 Magnetic Island, NE Queensland; J26147 7 km N of Chinchilla, SE Queensland.*

Menetia zynja sp.nov.

Holotype

J24454 Mt. Unbunmaroo, 90 km NW of Boulia, W Queensland (22°32'S, 140°18'E), collected by Andrew Elliot on 30 June, 1974.

Diagnosis

First (and only) supraocular much more than twice as long as wide, and in contact with first supraciliary. Two presuboculars. No white midlateral line.

Distribution

Known only from the type locality.

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 27. Tail regenerated. Nasals separated. Prefrontals contact and form a suture. Two presuboculars. One supraocular, with a large upper postocular posterior to it. Supraciliaries 3, second greatly enlarged but not in contact with prefrontal. Upper labials 6, 4th below the

orbit. Interparietal distinct. Midbody scale rows 22. Lamellae under fourth toe 20.

Brown dorsally and laterally, labials and side of neck pale and flecked with brown. Ventrally immaculate.

Remarks

M. zynja is similar to *M. maini* described by Storr (1976) from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. It differs in having two presuboculars and 3 supraciliaries to *maini's* one and two respectively.

M. zynja is known only from the holotype. The name was formed from an arbitrary combination of letters.

REFERENCES

Fuhn, I. E. (1969). The 'polyphyletic' origin of the genus *Ablepharus* (Reptilia, Scincidae): a case of parallel evolution. *Z. zool. Syst. EvolForsch.* 7: 67-76.

Storr, G. M. (1976). The genus Menetia (Lacertilia, Scincidae) in Western Australia. *Rec. West. Aust. Mus.* 4: 189-200.

To All FNCV Members

The last few pages of each 'Naturalist' are reserved for information about FNCV affairs and persons. Those pages are the chief means of communication of Council with all Club members. Whether or not you attend general meetings regularly, there will be much on those pages to interest you and often some things you should know. See page 220 in this issue.

A Huddle of Ducklings. Charming But Suspect!

At about 5 p.m. on 22 October 1976 I came on a huddle of ducklings on the lawn north of the lily lake in the Botanical Gardens. They were squatting on the grass with their heads turned to the centre of a tight little circle. There were no attendant adults.

Each duckling was about 14 cm long. Each had a yellow face with a dark line through the eye, dark top of head and brown back with a few biscuit blobs.

Next day I saw the ducklings on the lake. As about 5.30 p.m. they gathered from all directions to follow the mother bird, weaving their way along the lanes between the water lily leaves. Arrived at the north edge of the lake, they jumped on to the lawn by a two-level rise — where I had found them the previous evening.

There were ten ducklings and the mother. All birds groomed vigorously. Each seemed wholly absorbed by its own toilet. After about five minutes the mother gave some gentle little grunts and waddled off up the hill. Obviously the ducklings interpreted the grunts as "get into a huddle" for that is what they proceeded to do even while still preening.

The mother bird was nondescript grey-brown colour about the size of a Black Duck. I thought she was probably a Grey Teal, although the orange legs were puzzling.

Early in January 1977 there was another huddle of ten ducklings of the same sort bedded down in much the same place. The ten of the earlier brood were still on the lily lake; they were now the size of the mother and with similar nondescript brown plumage.

In April I saw a brown bird trailing behind a Mallard drake. I began to feel uneasy. Were they the parents of the two charming huddles?

A month later I saw five ducks with part plumage of the adult male Mallard. By June, a walk round the main lake revealed several Mallard drakes; females are less readily recognized at a distance.

Those in control of the Botanical Gardens would never think of providing a haven for pest plants and releasing them into the environment. Surely there should be a smiliar responsibility regarding pest birds.

M. J. Lester, South Yarra.